Chapter 8

Civic Virtues and the Goal of Likeness to God in Proclus' *Republic* *Commentary*

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Becoming like God by reading Plato

After Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, every school of philosophy took one of the central tasks of ethics to be the specification of the *telos* at which our actions aim and the nature of *eudaimonia*. Though Plato's works pre-date the *Ethics*, it is not too difficult to see the Aristotelian idea of a *telos* or goal of living implicit in the *Republic*.[1] After all, the point of this work is to show that the truly just man is happier than the unjust man – even an unjust man who enjoys a good reputation – by inquiring into the nature of justice. The case for the happiness of the just man is not prosecuted by explicitly identifying *what happiness is* and then showing that he enjoys more of it than the unjust man. Rather, Plato's *Republic* offers rich portraits of different possible psychic and civic constitutions. The argumentative force of the dialogue relies on the reader sharing a preconception of what a happy life should be like with the characters in the dialogue. The freedom from internal dissension that is characteristic of both the just person and the just city is never *argued* to be the font of a notion of happiness that is explicitly articulated. Rather, the lack of internal dissension is shown to be the source or basis of many features of an individual's life (or of our collective political lives) that the participants in the dialogue value. Moreover, lives (and cities) that diverge from the ideal of unity found in the just person are taken to be unhappier the greater

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N.B. All references to classical texts are from the Loeb Classical Library (LCL). Titles and authors are abbreviated according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary List, https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/abbreviation-list/

[1] Irwin 2007, 114–116. This observation about the continuity of Plato's ethical project with Aristotle and the dominance of Aristotle's framework for subsequent theorists is now part of received wisdom in magisterial overviews such as Irwin's book.

the internal dissension and lack of harmony that is involved. This is presented as at least one of the major reasons why these lives or these are ineffective and unhappy. So even if the exact nature of psychic or communal flourishing is left undefined, there is little doubt that unity plays a central role in securing it.[2]

In light of the starring role that psychic harmony plays in Plato's dialogue, it would not be unreasonable for a modern reader to respond to the question, "If the writer of the *Republic* had addressed himself to the topic in the style of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, what would he have identified as the *telos*?" with the answer "psychic harmony". The role of harmony among the different parts of the soul in showing why the life of the just person is happier than that of the unjust man lends a certain plausibility to the thought that *eudaimonia* is simply to be *identified* with psychic harmony even if that identification is not guaranteed by Plato's text.

It might then come as something of a surprise to learn that ancient Platonists from the 2nd century onwards used the Aristotelian framework and identified the goal of living with *likeness to god* rather than psychic harmony.[3] In reaching this conclusion, they gave pride of place to a text that Socrates himself identifies as a digression from the main argument in the *Theaetetus*.

> Socrates: But it is impossible that evils should be done away with, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good; and they cannot have their place among the gods but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth. Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the

[2] Of course, there are also *other* reasons why the just person is better off. So famously Book IX argues that the *pleasures* of the just philosopher in whom reason rules are superior to those in whom other parts of the soul dominate. This seems to be a result of the nature of the objects after which these souls strive. The things that philosophers seek to "fill their souls with" nourish the best part of us with the things that are truly real.

[3] Since the turn of the century some scholars have assessed this idea as a genuine reading of Plato. See Sedley 1999; Russell 2004; Armstrong 2004, 171–184.

> dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; [176b] and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise (φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι). … God is in no wise and in no manner unrighteous, but utterly and perfectly righteous, and there is nothing so like him as that one of us who in turn becomes most nearly perfect in righteousness. (*Tht*. 176a–b, trans. Fowler LCL vol. 123, 127–9.)

The virtues – perhaps to be explicated in terms of the relations among the parts of the soul – are here identified as the relevant respect in which we are to become like god. As a reading of Plato's *Republic*, this is not perhaps wildly implausible, and one can find at least one text where virtue and likeness to god are related.

> This, then, must be our conviction about the just man, that whether he fall into poverty or disease or any other supposed evil, for him all these things will finally prove good, both in life and in death. For by the gods assuredly that man will never be neglected who is willing and eager to be righteous, and *by the practice of virtue to be likened unto god so far as that is possible for man* (ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ.). [*Resp*. 613a–b, trans. Shorey, LCL vol. 276, p. 487, my emphasis]

The thought in this passage seems to be that the virtuous person is loved by the gods (*theophilos*) so that all that fate brings him works out for the best. When we consider *why* the just person is loved by the gods, then the old adage that love is an attraction of like to like[4]

[4] Cf. Hom. *Od*. 17.218 quoted in support of this idea in Pl. *Lysis* 214a.

recommends the view that, through his virtue, the just person is *like* god – to the extent that this is possible for a person. This likeness is to be achieved through the practice of virtue.

The idea that virtue renders a person like god and part of the community of gods is, of course, shared with Stoicism. What makes Neoplatonism's pursuit of the idea that virtue assimilates the human to the divine is the *manner* in which they suppose virtue is cultivated and perfected. Or at least this is what I have argued elsewhere.[5] To see the difference, consider the way in which Epictetus' philosophical writings both exhort his audience to virtue and elucidate what that virtue consists in. Epictetus' exhortation to virtue is frequently couched in *opposition* to the careful study of texts.[6] The books of Chrysippus are not without value, in Epictetus' view, but anyone who supposes that he will become virtuous simply by reading them until he knows them back to front is missing something. By contrast, the Neoplatonic schools were what Brian Stock described as textual communities.[7] It was precisely through dedicated and communal reading of the great works of Aristotle and especially Plato that one acquired and perfected the virtues.

So tight was the connection between virtues and texts that the curriculum of Platonic works studied within these communities was explicitly correlated with stages of moral and intellectual improvement. Since there are only four cardinal virtues, but a wide range of Platonic text studied by the Neoplatonists, an extended textual-aretaic correlation was possible because the cardinal virtues themselves were multiplied through the introduction of *gradations* of virtues. What was implicit in Plotinus was clarified by Porphyry in his *Sentences*.

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[5] Baltzly 2014.
[6] *Disc*. I.4.13, ff; II.21.11, IV.4. 11 (Schenkl).
[7] Stock 1983.

But the most extensive list of gradations was introduced by Iamblichus in his work *On Virtues* and we find it described in Damascius' *Phaedo Commentary* I. §§ 138–51 (Westerink).[8]

i. Natural – held in common with animals and linked to the mixtures of the body (cf. Galen). There is the possibility of clash between these virtues. Either they belong to the body or they are reflexes of reason not impeded by some disorder or they are due to training in a previous life.

ii. Ethical – acquired by habituation and right belief. Since they are beyond the influence of temperament or mixture of body, they do not clash with one another. They belong to both reason and the irrational nature. *Laws* 2.653a.

iii. Civic – these are virtues of reason, but of reason *in relation to* the irrational part of the soul when it orders (*kosmountos*) these parts and uses it as its instrument. "through *phronēsis* ordering the *gnostic* part; through courage ordering the spirit; the appetitive by temperance and all of them by justice."

iv. Purificatory – belong to reason, but reason insofar as it *withdraws* from relations to other things. It discards the body as instrument and restrains activities that depend on this instrument. The cathartic virtues deliver the soul from genesis. *Phdo* 69bc

v. Theoretic – exist in the soul when soul has forgotten itself and reverts upon what is above it: intellect. They are a kind of mirror image of the civic virtues, since they indicate the soul's activity in relation to something other than itself. The civic virtues operate by reason, while the theoretic virtues operate by

[8] For the elaboration of this theme in Plotinus by Porphyry, see Brisson 2006. For its deployment in subsequent Neoplatonists see Baltzly 2004 and Finamore 2012.

intellect. These virtues operate in both a cognitive and appetitive manner (*gnōstikōs kai orektikōs*). "It is as if the soul aspires to become *nous* instead of soul, but *nous* is both [gnostic and orektic]." These virtues are discussed in the *Theaetetus*.

vi. Paradigmatic – virtues exhibited by soul when it is no longer contemplating intellect, but it is established by participation (*kata methexin*) *in* the intellect which is the paradigm of all things. Damascius credits Iamblichus, not Porphyry, with introducing this level of virtue.

vii. Hieratic – exist in the "one of the soul." They are coextensive with all the grades of virtue discussed earlier. However, the hieratic virtues are proper to the One, while the others are concerned with Being.

These virtues are developed through the twelve dialogues that Iamblichus assumed to communicate the whole of Plato's philosophy.[9]

1. *Alcibiades I* – introductory on the self
2. *Gorgias* – civic virtue
3. *Phaedo* – purificatory virtue
4. *Cratylus* – theoretic virtue: the contemplation of Being through names
5. *Theaetetus* – theoretic virtue: the contemplation of Being through concepts (*noêmata*)
6. *Sophist* – theoretic virtue: the contemplation of Being through things (*pragmata*): physics

[9] For a survey of the reading order of Plato's dialogues and its importance, see Tarrant 2014.

7. *Statesman* –theoretic virtue: the contemplation of Being through things: physics
8. *Phaedrus* – theoretic virtue: the contemplation of Being through things: theology
9. *Symposium* – theoretic virtue: the contemplation of Being through things: theology
10. *Philebus* – culmination of this decad in the contemplation of the Good beyond Being.

Two further dialogues were believed to recapitulate and perfect this teaching under the heading of physics and theology. These crowning dialogues were the *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*.

Because of textual problems with our the most explicit statement of this correlation between textual and moral correlation, some of this remains a bit uncertain.[10] In particular, it remains mysterious whether the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* were supposed to correlate to distinct gradations of the virtues. Moreover, the author of the *Anonymous Prolegomena* omits mention of paradigmatic and hieratic virtues, mentioning only natural, ethical, civic, purificatory and theoretic virtues. But even with these limitations in our evidence, we can see that the Neoplatonic reading order of the dialogues was supposed to correlate in *some* fairly close way with the cultivation of virtues that would culminate in the goal of likeness to god.

This raises a puzzle, for when we consider a work like Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the Gorgias* or any of our surviving commentaries on the *Phaedo*, it is far from obvious exactly what civic or purificatory virtues are and even more mysterious how these works are supposed to inculcate them. A cynic might suppose that the scale of virtues that correlates with progress through the Platonic curriculum is simply a pretext. The scholastic attention to the minutiae of Plato's dialogues and the wild allegorising characteristic of the Neoplatonic

[10] The text, of course, is the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*. On the textual uncertainties, see Westerink 1962, xxxvii–xl.

commentary tradition were pursued as an end in themselves with very little thought to moral development. Even those engaged in this textual fetishism could not really have supposed that they became better, more divine men or women through it.

This cynicism, however, does not sit well with our surviving evidence of the Neoplatonists' self-conception. Works like Marinus' *Life of Proclus* are centred around the scale of virtues.[11] Though it is perhaps less explicit in Damascius' *Life of Isidore*,[12] it is nonetheless clear that the ancient Platonists took seriously the correlation between reading Plato and becoming better people – and specifically more godlike people.

Paideia and Platonism

If we are to respect the evidence in front of us, then we must endeavour to see how the teaching settings that are reflected more or less directly in our surviving Plato commentaries could have been thought to contribute to the ideal of assimilation to the divine. I believe that the most plausible answer to this question emerges from a comparison with the teaching situations through which young men (and sometimes women) of the late Roman Empire absorbed *paideia*. By *paideia* I mean the ability to write or speak in a linguistic style associated with the Empire's educated elite along with a knowledge of canonical authors that enabled the creative use of quotation, allusion and analogy to convey meanings in a way that similarly educated persons could appreciate and others could not.[13] Since Brown's *Power and Persuasion*, historians of late antiquity have examined the *social* functions of *paideia* in binding together the diverse peoples who composed the governing elite of the vast empire

[11] Cf. Edwards 2000, li.
[12] O' Meara & Sang-Ki 2006.
[13] In this incomplete and general characterisation of the nature and purpose of late antique education I do not take myself to be saying anything novel and certainly nothing controversial. For an overview, see Watts 2012.

and limiting the exercise of authority by virtue of *paideia*'s implicit claims to civilised treatment.[14]

Philosophy and acquaintance with the texts of Plato in particular was a part of general *paideia*. But membership in the Platonic schools went beyond this. While general *paideia* enabled the performance of a particular social identity for others, the distinctively philosophical *paideia* of the Platonic schools aimed at a primarily internal transformation. If a "gentleman's education" served to change the way in which *others perceived you*, the intense Platonic education of the schools sought to transform the manner in which *you perceived yourself* and all other things. It too involved taking on a distinctive language, but more than that it sought to supplant what were supposed to be the concepts and discursive habits of an embodied soul for the superior stock of concepts and immediate intellectual insight or *nous* that characterise the soul in its disembodied state. The education the gradation of virtues that was realised through the reading of Plato's dialogues was identical to the capacity to live and experience one's world through ideas and images derived from those dialogues – to live *in* and *through* the text of Plato.[15]

This, at least, is my best hypothesis for explaining the apparent gap between what the commentary tradition aims at – the acquisition of increasingly abstract gradations of the cardinal virtues – and what it consists in: pages and pages of creative exegesis of Platonic texts. This exhaustive exegesis was meant to lay the foundations for a kind of Platonic literacy that is parallel in important ways to the literacy of general *paideia*. But instead of performing that literacy publicly in order to be an educated person in the eyes of others, Platonic literacy

[14] Brown 1992.
[15] The general notion of 'living in and through' the dialogues of Plato is developed at greater length in Baltzly 2014; Baltzly 2017.

is performed both with and for an even more select circle of others – the fellow members of one's philosophical circle – as well as *internally* for oneself. This internal discursive practice (together with asceticism and ritual magic or theurgy) was thought to enable moments of non-discursive awareness of the really real (i.e. the divine intelligibles) and beyond that awareness of the ineffable font of what is really real (i.e. the One).

If this hypothesis about the educational or transformative function of the commentary tradition is correct, then when we turn to a work on one of these gradations of virtue, we should find two things. First, readings of Plato's text that enable the audience to understand familiar aspects of their world differently and better by virtue of seeing them in Platonic terms. By developing "Platonic literacy" these readings enable the philosophical initiate to read his world in terms of a new metaphors to live by. Second, since the virtues are that *through which* we are assimilated to the divine, a proper understanding of these virtues will proceed through "theological" resources.[16] After all, if x serves to *liken* A to B, then an understanding of x's nature must make reference to B. Since what the Neoplatonists mean by "theology" takes in what contemporary philosophers call "metaphysics" – and perhaps more as well; cf. Proclus, *Plat. Theol*. I.3 – this means that the exegesis of Platonic passages concerned with the virtues will involve appeal to metaphysics.

Call the first of these the re-visioning prediction and the second the mirroring prediction. In what follows I will try to lend some weight to my hypothesis about the ethical

[16] Abbate 2006 makes the point that Proclus' moral and political philosophy is shot through with metaphysics (and thus theology). As he puts it (p. 200): "Metaphysics and theology (which in late Neoplatonism is strictly connected with metaphysical theory) are the true sources and reference points of Proclus' political speculation: in these two kinds of knowledge Proclus finds the paradigmatic and conceptual structures on the basis of which he deems it possible to elaborate a political theorization of some sort." One cannot but agree. Abbate, however, does not draw the connection that I am seeking to make: that since the virtues are precisely those states of the soul and intellect through which we are assimilated to the divine, the account of those states must mirror the metaphysical relations among divinities or abstract objects.

purpose of the Platonic commentary tradition by showing that these two predictions are realised in the case of Proclus' treatment of the civic virtues in his essay on *Republic* IV.

The Mirroring Prediction

Somewhat surprisingly to modern readers, the *Republic* was not on the Neoplatonists' list of Plato's twelve most important books. It normally fell outside the scope of the established curriculum and thus Proclus' commentary, or series of essays on it, is unique among the surviving Neoplatonic works on Plato. Their view about the *Republic* was that it dealt with the civic grade of virtues and thus its place in the curriculum was filled by the *Gorgias* which was also deemed to be concerned with civic virtues.[17] The shorter book was doubtless more tractable as a text for a close and sustained reading than the lengthier *Republic*.

While the middle books of the *Republic* are replete with metaphysics, Plato's initial account of the nature of the virtues in book IV is not. The division of the soul into its three parts is motivated by an argument that appeals only to homely, down-to-earth examples of psychic conflicts common to everyday life and spinning tops. It contains no intimation of the metaphysical complexities that will be introduced in the middle books that immediately follow. While book X seeks to demonstrate the immortality of the soul and provides a myth of its post-mortem judgement, book IV's account of the soul is seemingly indifferent to its status as corporeal or incorporeal, mortal or immortal. This is not to say that the middle books of the *Republic*, with their metaphysics of the Forms and the Good beyond Being are irrelevant to the argument of book IV. The subsequent books identify the hastily sketched

[17] Cf. Proclus, *in R*. I 10.10–14 and I 208.29 (Kroll) on why the virtues described in Book IV of *Republic* are specifically *civic* virtues. For the place of the *Gorgias* in the curriculum, see the introduction to Olympiodorus 1998.

guardians of *Republic* III and IV with *philosophers* and show why, given the nature of the objects that they love and understand (i.e. Forms), it is reasonable that they should rule. In so doing, the subsequent books seek to vindicate a claim that Glaucon admits far too quickly and easily at 428b – that the city they have constructed is governed well and wisely. But these considerations offer subsequent support for the premise in the Book IV argument that the city is wholly good. They do not affect the arguments through which the virtues themselves are identified with relations among the parts of the soul.

By contrast, Proclus' exegesis of the arguments of *Republic* IV is suffused with metaphysics – that is to say, reference to the intelligible, divine causes or gods to which the virtues assimilate the human soul. It is not merely that he brings in metaphysical principles to provide foundations for claims that are otherwise grounded only in the agreement of Socrates' interlocuters (though he does that, of course). Rather, Proclus is at pains to emphasise the manner in which *the structure of the virtuous soul mirrors relations among intelligible causes*. Let us consider some examples.

Reflection upon the account of the virtues sketched in *Republic* IV shows that some virtues, such as wisdom and courage, are present in the city or in the soul by virtue of a single part of the whole considered in isolation. The other two – justice and temperance – are grounded in relations among all the parts.[18] A person or city is just when each part of the soul or social class serves that function that it does best and does not meddle in the functions of the other parts. Similarly, a soul or a city exhibits temperance when there is agreement among all the elements about who should rule.

[18] The point is made clearly at *Resp*. IV, 431e–32a by noting that moderation is more like a harmony than courage or wisdom, which have been discussed previously.

In Proclus, this largely implicit feature of Plato's account is explicitly presented in terms of the "Platonic categories" of *pros ti* and *kath auto*. The tradition of these two as a Platonic alternative to Aristotle's ten categories is a very old one and finds it textual basis in the manner in which this distinction in drawn in the *Sophist*.[19] The context of the *Sophist* assures that this distinction between *kath auto* and *pros ti* will also be related to the *megista genê* or five greatest kinds that permeate all things: Being, Sameness, Difference, Motion and Rest. Each is what it is *kath auto*, but Sameness and Difference are, in addition, also *pros ti*.

Proclus combines this logico-metaphysical distinction with another standard division in Neoplatonic thought: the distinction between *ousia*, *dynamis*, and *energeia*. Now in the strict sense, a virtue is a source of perfection in the cognitive or appetitive life of a being (*In R.* I 206.12–13). But we can, in accordance with the distinction between *kath auto* and *pros ti*, divide activities into those that a thing manifests in relation to itself and those that it manifests in relation to other things. The sum of these distinctions is then applied to the case of the soul's virtues in this way:

> The perfection and the activity of each of the beings is one thing when it is considered in itself, but something else when considered in relation to another. In the same way, the existence of each of thing is one thing is different from the relation of that thing to another. After all, the perfection of man is one thing, but the perfection of man-who-is-a-master is another, just as man

[19] On the "Platonic categories", see Hermodorus ap. Simplic. *in Phys*. 248.2–5 (Diel); Xenocrates ap. Simplicius, *in Cat.* 63.21–64.12 (Kalbfleisch); Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 3.108–9 (Dorandi); Sextus, *adv*. *Math.* 10.263–6 (Mutschmann). For an assessment of the relation of these reports to Plato's thought, see Fine 1993, 171–182.

> is not the same thing as a master. Nor is it the same thing to view the soul simpliciter and to view it ruling the body (*In R*. I 207.15–23, Kroll).[20]

Each of the three parts of the soul thus has a self-directed activity and an other-directed activity. Reason's *kath auto* perfection consists simply in promoting a life that is theoretical and purified from the body. Similarly, the spirited part of the soul's *kath auto* perfection lies in the things that relate to it alone – in particular, visiting revenge upon those who have slighted you. Finally, the activity of appetite manifests that part's non-relational virtue when it welcomes any and every pleasure without even having reference to its own set of preferences among the sources of pleasure. That is its *ergon* considered *kath auto* (*In R*. I 208.5–22, Kroll). Distinctively civic virtues, however, are manifested in the psychic parts' *relational* activity.

> One might say that each kind among the three acts in this manner [sc. virtuously *kath auto*] when it does only what belongs to it, as if were not subordinate to the rule of the remaining [parts]. But since all these things have been yoked together with one another and constitute a single life, it is necessary to distinguish the relational activity of all of them and thus to see both the virtue and the vice that belongs to each one. It is this disposition that it defined as *political virtue* since it is such as to perfect the relational life of the parts of the soul. The opposite disposition to this is the one that destroys the vital relation that these parts naturally have to one another (*In R.* I 208.23–209.2, Kroll).

[20] Translations from Essay 7 of Proclus' *Republic Commentary* are from the forthcoming second volume *Proclus: Commentry on Plato's Republic*, in Dirk Baltzly, John Finamore and Graeme Miles, (Cambridge University Press).

Proclus appeal to the logico-metaphysical categories of *pros ti* and *kath auto* clarifies some aspects of Plato's own discussion. While it might initially appear that the virtues of wisdom and courage are a matter of one class within the city or one part of the soul considered in isolation, this initial impression is in fact misleading. Courage consists in the spirited part or the auxiliaries acting *under the command of* reason. Less obviously, civic wisdom consists in the reasoning part of the soul's providential care *for* the entire person – including the mortal, irrational parts of the soul. All the virtues are thus relational. Indeed, this is what makes them properly called *civic* virtues. Yet at the same time, each has its own non-relational *kath auto* virtue. The virtues thus exhibit the same *kath auto* and *pros ti* relations that we find among the *megista genê*. Each is what it is *kath auto*, but each also stands in a relation. Motion, for instance, is the same as itself and different from Rest.

The tripartite division of the soul and the city is illuminated by an appeal to another principle of Neoplatonic metaphysics: the doctrine of mean terms. The Neoplatonists adopt as a general principle Plato's account of the binding of earth and fire by air and water in the *Timaeus*. A mean or middle term (*meson*) stands between any two apparently incompatible extreme or end terms (*akra*). Like the middle term in a proportion, the mean term "binds" the two extremes together. In the context of Proclus' exegesis of the virtues in *Republic* IV, the spirited part of the soul is likewise a mean between two extremes. Reason is akin to the intellect, while Desire is akin to the body. The Spirited part of the soul forms a mean between these two extremes in the same way that 4 unites 2 and 8 in a geometric proportion.

It is also characteristic of the doctrine of mean terms that the intermediate term partakes of both extremes. Thus soul, as both generated (relative to timeless intellect) and ungenerated (relative to body that only ever comes to be) is a mean term that binds together

corporeal intelligible natures. As general formula, the doctrine of mean terms can be represented as A: A&B: B with the understanding that there is some prima facie incompatibility between A and B which is resolved by the introduction of an intermediate that is A in some regard, but B in some other regard. The spirited part of the soul is such a mean term between reason (which only rules) and appetite (which only is ruled). The spirited part both rules appetite and is ruled by reason. Proclus takes some time to show that the ruling aspect of the spirited part of the soul does not rule in the same sense in which reason rules. Spirit's capacity to rule, when exercised without the guidance of reason, is merely a kind of bullying. The A in the A&B combination that mediates between A simpliciter and B simpliciter is transformed by its combination with B. This exactly parallels the distinct senses in which soul and intellect can be said to be ungenerated. The former is ungenerated in the sense that there was never a time when it did not exist. The latter is ungenerated by virtue of transcending time entirely.

There is some evidence to suggest that Plato regarded the virtues of person as, in some sense, prior to the virtues of cities. At the very least he remarks that:

> "Is it not, then," said I, "impossible for us to avoid admitting this much, that the same forms and qualities are to be found in each one of us that are in the state? They could not get there from any other source. It would be absurd to suppose that the element of high spirit was not derived in states from the private citizens who are reputed to have this quality as the populations of the Thracian and Scythian lands and generally of northern regions. [*Resp*. IV, 435e–436a, trans. Shorey, LCL vol. 237, pp. 379, 381]

On the other hand, Socrates' treatment of the degenerate forms of constitution stresses the importance of the familial and civic environment in which a person is raised. If cities are as their citizens make them, then it is equally true that citizens are as their cities make them. So Plato's text is at least superficially ambiguous about whether individuals of a particular kind are ontologically prior to political orders of a particular kind or vice versa. (Perhaps more plausibly yet, Plato may have supposed that there was a complex interplay between psychic and civic types so that neither is inevitably primary).

Proclus, however, argues for a strong version of the priority of individual virtues to the virtues of city-states. His argument relies heavily upon metaphysical considerations that are conspicuously absent from Plato's text.

> After all, the city is greater in extent than a single soul, even if the virtues of the city are [merely] images of the virtues of the individual soul since it is surely the case here too the principle that says that things that more indivisible exceed in power the things that have undergone a decline into greater divisibility and the things that are fewer in number surpass in power what is greater in quantity. (*In R.* I 217.10–16, Kroll)

So, the priority of psychic virtues over the virtues of cities results from, and displays again for us, a familiar principle about the relations of precedence among the divine causes.

The same is true of the order among the three parts of the soul. Proclus is not content with Plato's rather limited evidence for the superiority of reason to the spirit and appetite. Instead,

he exhibits the order of the psychic parts as a result of the manner in which effects proceed from the order of causes.[21]

> By virtue of this fact [sc. that desire loves the body], as we said, it is third, just as the reasoning part is first since it loves intellect, while the spirited part is intermediate since it loves power. For power is intermediate between intellect and existence (hyparxis). The reflection of this (sc. existence) extends to the third [rank] and because of this fact, it [sc. the reflection of existence] desires the body which solely participates in it. The reflection of power extends to what is prior [to the reflection of existence] and because of this fact desires power, while the reflection of intellect extends only to the very first position and because of this fact it longs after intellection. Here too the following principle prevails – the one that shows that the reflections of the things that come first advance to greater extent and that the things that are higher are the objects of desire for more things than those that are lower. Thus, the final stage of the soul is such as to love the body and desires this alone: the preservation of the body. (*In R*. I 226,11–22, Kroll)

Here we have a familiar metaphysical or theological principle of Neoplatonism: the effects of higher causes extend further down than those of intermediate causes. In the case at hand, we have an echo of the notion that matter is a kind of negative reflection of the One – the causal contributions of the causes intermediate between the One and matter having exhausted themselves previously. In the case at hand, we have a familiar Neoplatonic triple: hyparxis, dynamis and nous ordered from more to less general. Everything participates in

[21] For a much more detailed explanation of this passage, see MacIsaac 2009, 126–130.

existence. More things participate in power than participate in nous. So, the desiring part of the soul is here equated with the sole product of the highest of these causes – hyparxis – and the generality of bare existence is mirrored in the indefiniteness of body which is the object of love for this reflection or emphasis of the higher cause. The spirited part of the soul is product of both hypostases – hyparxis and dynamis – and as a result of its origins desires power or authority as well as the preservation of the body. In fact, as the locus of courage, the spirited part may on some occasions desire to exercise authority and to claim victory even at the expense of the body. Finally, the reasoning part of the soul is the product of all three and desires only the distinctive activity of its most proximate cause – the activity of intellection. Graphically we can present the situation as follows.

This is a complex metaphysical picture and doubtless we could raise objections to it, perhaps even from the point of view of Proclus' views on the nature of procession elsewhere. But the point I want to make here is simply that it is a tale about divine causes. The structure of the parts of the soul and the soul's virtues reflect relations among divine causes – i.e. gods – and this is exactly what we should expect if virtues serve to render us godlike.

The revisioning prediction

We turn now to another thing we should expect to find if my hypothesis about the function of the commentary tradition is correct. I have supposed that the reading of the Platonic dialogues under the guidance of the proper teacher does not merely *inform* us about the civic, purificatory and theoretic virtues. It inculcates those virtues in us by giving us new concepts that permit us to live in and through the Platonic dialogues. This, I have claimed, involves the acquisition of a kind of Platonic literacy that allows us to read the world and ourselves in light of the truth of Plato's philosophy.

The Neoplatonists supposed that both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic* deal with the civic gradation of virtue. In the case of both dialogues, a key theme in their reading is that the entire cosmos constitutes a *polis*. The ideal government of a human *polis* should imitate the provident governance of the cosmos. The ideal constitution within the individual soul will likewise realise relations strongly analogous to the cosmic *politea*. In the case of the *Gorgias*, the analogy between cosmic and human constitutions is conveyed through the concluding myth of judgement.[22] Likewise, in the *Republic* the Neoplatonists took the astronomical details of the Myth of Er to be more than mere decoration. In addition to conveying information about the post-mortem fate of the soul, the myth also shows that the cosmos too is a *polis* which contains divine classes exactly analogous to those in the ideal city state (*In R.* II 98.7–99.23, Kroll).

[22] Olympiodorus supposes that the myth gives the "paradigmatic cause" of the civic well-being. This, of course, is the cosmic macrocosm of which the well-ordered soul is a microcosm. For the overall purpose of the myth, see *In Gorg*. 46.7 (Jackson et al)– a point that does not emerge clearly form the detailed exegesis that follows in Lectures 47 and 48.

Two examples will illustrate the manner in which Proclus' reading of *Republic* IV provides open-ended opportunities for reading and interpreting one's life through the image of the human soul, the polis, and the entire cosmos as structured in just the same way.

At the conclusion of his essay, Proclus notes that while Socrates has shown that the three parts of the soul under discussion are essentially distinct, he has not shown that this enumeration of psychic parts is exhaustive. Could there not be other parts, in addition to reason, spirit and appetite? The answer to this question yields a way of looking at our own psychic unity as an image of the unity of the cosmos.

We have already noted Proclus use of the doctrine of mean terms to portray the spirited part of the soul as intermediate between reason and appetite. In the final part of his essay he returns to the theme of binding wholes together by terms in proportion. In the *Timaeus* Plato famously argued that there must be four elements in order to bind fire and earth into a single cosmos. Since these were three dimensional they are "solid numbers" – that is to say, numbers that are the product of three numbers. Between two such solid numbers, it takes two middle terms to establish a continuous geometric progression.

In his commentary on the *Timaeus*, Proclus notes that there is a method for finding the means between two solid numbers. One method involves finding two means each having two factors in common with one extreme and one with the other. Thus to find the mean proportional terms between 8 (2x2x2) and 27 (3x3x3) use 2x2x3 and 2x3x3 to arrive at 12 and 18. Proclus assigns three powers to each of the elements and shows how the intermediates bind together the extremes (fire and earth) in just the same way

Fire	tenuous	Sharp	easily moved

Air	tenuous	Blunt	easily moved
Water	dense	Blunt	easily moved
Earth	dense	Blunt	moved with difficulty

In this table, each element shares two powers with its neighbour and this provides a physical counterpart to the arithmetic example above.

In the case at hand, the extreme terms are taken to be the faculty of reason and the body. Just as air and water provide the terms of a continuous geometric proportion between the opposed elements of fire and earth, so too the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul bind reason to the body.

Reason	indivisible	having desire	intellectual
Spirit	indivisible	having desire	lacking intellect
Appetite	plural in form/parts	having desire	lacking intellect
Body	having many parts	lacking desire	lacking intellect

The assignment of these defining features is not an entirely arbitrary imposition on Plato's text. Proclus thinks that the appetitive part of the soul has multiple parts and forms because Plato calls it a hydra or many-headed beast. Similarly, the spirited part of the soul is more like the indivisible reason because in the degenerate forms of constitution there is only one misfit – timocracy – corresponding to the domination of this part of the soul over the others.

Whatever the merits of the assignments of terms, the effect is to exhibit a strong parallel between the interior world of the individual human soul and the cosmos as a whole. So just as there were only two elements necessary to create a unified cosmos containing the opposed elements of fire and earth, so too there are only two psychic parts necessary to create a unified microcosmos constituted from the extremes of a rational soul and a human body. Not only does the parallel of elemental and psychic bonds establish a continuity between the human being and the cosmos, we must also keep in mind that the parallel drawn in the *Timaeus* itself invites the reader to see the physical unity of the cosmos as an image of the unity of series of numbers. Proclus now adds a third term to that analogia. As the unity of the world is to the unity of a continuous geometric proportion, so is the unity of the soul–body composite to the cosmos itself. The commentary thus enables a self-conception that places us as a limiting case of a unity that is manifested everywhere else.

The other way in which the *Timaeus* is connected to Proclus' reading of *Republic* IV is through the notion of harmonies in the World Soul. Famously *Timaeus* 36a–b encodes into composition of the World Soul ratios corresponding to the harmonic intervals of the octave, the fifth, the fourth, the tone and the Pythagorean semi-tone. In his *Republic* Plato likens the virtue of moderation to *symphonia* or *harmonia* (430e, 431e, 442c) and at 432a3 remarks that is sung throughout all the parts of the city. Proclus seizes upon διὰ πασῶν συνάδοντας in order to introduce the idea that the "distance" between the faculty of reason and appetite corresponds to the musical interval of the octave. The term for this musical interval is διὰ πασῶν and it is identified with the ratio 2:1. So the three parts of the soul constitute an octave. In Pythagorean musical theory, an octave is composed of a fifth (3:2) and a fourth (4:3). Proclus takes the interval between reason and spirit to correlate with the fifth and that between spirit and appetite to correlate with the fourth on the grounds that the fifth is the

"more perfect" harmony and that the consonance between reason and spirit is closer than that between spirit and appetite. (There are, as Proclus himself saw, reasons to put things the other way around, but those details need not detain us here.)

It is one thing to regard deviations from the ideal, virtuous psychic type as a kind of disharmony in *some* vague sense. It is quite another envision distinct and acoustically identifiable harmonies corresponding to the correct relations among the parts of a soul. When we witness the actions of the timocrat – the man who cares too much for reputation and winning – we can take ourselves to "hear" the badly played fifth between his reason and his spirit. When, at the end of the day, we reflect on our own conduct, we can imagine this self-inspection as one might the concentration and experimentation that takes place in tuning a guitar. Was my comment in the seminar today intended to be constructive or to display my own superior learning? Did I succeed in playing a fifth or some other, inharmonious chord? When I felt no shame at my desire for more money, did spirit and appetite within me produce a harmonious fourth or some other, jarring note? Finally, the identification of the relations among the parts of the virtuous soul with specific harmonies also enables the thought that our own souls might or might not be in tune with the harmonies of the World Soul.

Establishing these parallels between the soul's virtues and the cosmos provides a way of deepening and enriching metaphors that were already present in Greek thought. The image of the human as a microcosm is familiar already, as is the image of the virtuous life as harmonious. These were metaphors the ancients already lived by. But these quite specific additions to those metaphors give a clear sense to the idea of a kind of moral and intellectual progress in Platonic literacy – a literacy which enabled those who possessed it to live in and through Plato's dialogues.

Conclusion

I have offered a general theory of how the Platonic commentary tradition was intended to function within the life project of the Neoplatonic philosophers. This general theory yields two predictions about what we will find when we turn to an example from that commentary tradition. I have argued that this is exactly what we find in Proclus' remarks on the civic virtues in Republic IV. I take this to provide some modest measure of confirmation for the general theory. Of course – as in any enterprise that undertakes this methodology – there is still ample room for me to be wrong. If H predicts P and P is observed, it does not inevitably follow that H is correct. That is the fallacy of affirming the consequent. The degree to which the fact that the prediction is fulfilled supports the truth of the hypothesis depends on the likelihood that we have observe P even if H were false. Here it must be conceded that there may be considerable scope for doubt. After all, one of my predictions was that we would see Proclus dragging in lots and lots of metaphysical machinery in his exegesis of Plato's text. The hypothesis that the Neoplatonists were just pathologically obsessed with metaphysics would predict that too. So, you might think that it is hardly surprising that I found what I thought I would find.

Only sustained testing of my general theory about the function of commentary writing could hope to vindicate it. This much, however, can be said for it in opposition to its alternatives. It takes Neoplatonic philosophy and its stated soteriological aims seriously. It *is* very puzzling how anyone could have supposed that all this detailed attention to Plato's text, and the often very creative exegesis that accompanied it, assimilate a person to the divine.[23]

[23] Ahbel-Rappe (2000) takes up a closely related puzzle: if the Neoplatonists seek union with an *ineffable* source of all things, then why is their philosophical project so dominated by

I have taken that goal seriously and provided an account of how highly intelligent and sincere philosophers could have spent whole lifetimes doing this. This account may be mistaken, but it at least fulfils what I take to be the guiding principle of all humanistic work in Classics and Ancient Philosophy: *humani nihil a me alienum*.

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discursive activities? While we may not agree on the solution to this puzzle, it is surely the right sort of question to ask.

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